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E.O. 12065: N/A
TAGS: IS, PEPR, IZ
SUBJECT: BEGIN PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING RAID ON
IRAQI NUCLEAR REACTOR

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY J.L. DATE 9/30/82
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED☐ RELEASABLE☒
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1. SUMMARY. AT A JUNE 9 NEWS CONFERENCE PM BEGIN VOWED THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT TOLERATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION BY ANY OF ITS ENEMIES AND WOULD DESTROY THE IRAQI NUCLEAR REACTOR ONCE AGAIN IF IT WAS REBUILT. APPEALING FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTION AND RESPONDING TO U.S. CRITICISM, BEGIN ATTACKED THE STATE DEPARTMENT FOR OPENLY CRITICIZING THE ACTION RATHER THAN THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS. REFERRING TO ISRAEL'S PREEMPTIVE RAID, BEGIN SAID THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PLANT WAS CALCULATED TO PRODUCE ATOMIC BOMBS FOR USE AGAINST ISRAEL. THE RAID HAD TO BE STAGED NOW, IF EVER, BEGIN SAID, BECAUSE TO HAVE WAITED UNTIL THE REACTOR

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BECAME OPERATIONAL AND THEN DESTROY IT WOULD HAVE HAD CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES WHICH NO ISRAELI LEADER WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT. ISRAELI GENERALS WERE TIGHTLIPPED ABOUT DETAILS OF THE OPERATION BUT CLAIMED IT WENT OFF PERFECTLY. IT WAS CLAIMED THAT IF THE SAUDIS HAD THE AWACS THE U.S. INTENDS TO SELL TO THEM, ISRAELI PLANES WOULD NOT HAVE GONE UNDETECTED. FRANCE AND ITALY WERE SINGLED OUT FOR CRITICISM BY BEGIN FOR ASSISTING IRAQ TO BUILD THE REACTOR. END SUMMARY.

2. IN AN IMPLIED THREAT OF FUTURE ACTION, PRIME MINISTER BEGIN WARNED YESTERDAY THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT "ALLOW ANY ENEMY TO DEVELOP WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION TO BE TURNED AGAINST US," AND "SHOULD THE IRAQIS TRY AGAIN TO BUILD A REACTOR THROUGH WHICH THEY CAN PRODUCE ATOMIC WEAPONS, ISRAEL WILL USE ALL THE POSSIBILITIES AT ITS DISPOSAL TO DESTROY THAT REACTOR." AT A NEWS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY, BEGIN WAS JOINED BY CHIEF OF STAFF EITAN, AIR

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FORCE COMMANDER IVRI AND CHIEF OF INTELLIGENCE SAGI IN RESPONDING TO REPORTERS' QUESTIONS ON THE PLANNING, TIMING, AND REACTION TO THE RAID. A SUMMARY OF MAJOR POINTS FOLLOWS:

3. BEGIN ENTHUSIASTICALLY JUSTIFIED THE RAID SAYING THAT "DESPITE ALL THE CONDEMNATIONS ... ISRAEL HAS NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR" BECAUSE IT WAS SADDAM HUSSEIN'S "AMBITION" TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS A FORM OF BLACKMAIL "TO BRING ISRAEL TO HER KNEES ON BEHALF OF THE ARAB WORLD OR TO DESTROY HER ... EXISTENCE...." THE PROOF OF THIS WAS IN A STATEMENT IN THE IRAQI NEWSPAPER ALTHAWRA ON OCTOBER 4, 1980, IN WHICH HUSSEIN IS ALLEGED TO HAVE SAID "THE IRANIAN PEOPLE SHOULD NOT FEAR THE IRAQI NUCLEAR REACTOR, WHICH IS NOT INTENDED TO BE USED AGAINST IRAN, BUT AGAINST THE ZIONIST ENEMY."

4. BEGIN LABELED THE ACTION "AN ACT OF SUPREME LEGITIMATE SELF-DEFENSE," ANALOGIZING THE DEED TO THE BRITISH ACTION AT DUNKIRK (SIC). RESPONDING TO U.S. CRITICISM, HE SAID THAT "IN VAIN DO THEY SEEK IN THE CAPITAL OF OUR ALLY AND FRIEND THE UNITED STATES REASONS TO COMPLAIN THAT WE MISUSED THE WEAPONS WE GOT FROM THE UNITED STATES." (IVRI SUBSEQUENTLY ADMITTED THAT "PLANES OF THE F-15 AND F-16 WERE AMONG THE AIRCRAFT PARTICIPATING IN THE OPERATION.") BEGIN SAID HE FELT SURE THAT PRESIDENT REAGAN "WILL UNDERSTAND FULLY OUR MOTIVES." HE ESCHEWED ENGAGING IN "AN OPEN DEBATE" WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT, SUGGESTING, HOWEVER, THAT THE DEPARTMENT HAD DEPARTED FROM SECRETARY HAIG'S PROMISE DURING HIS RECENT

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VISIT THAT CRITICISM WOULD NOT BE OPEN BUT "DONE IN A
DISCREET AND DIPLOMATIC WAY." "I READ DISTINCTLY THE
SECOND STATEMENT MADE BY THE SPOKESMAN OF THE U.S. STATE
DEPARTMENT, EVEN BEFORE MY LETTER REACHED PRESIDENT
REAGAN AND WITH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT MY LETTER IS ON
ITS WAY TO PRESIDENT REAGAN. I READ THIS STATEMENT AND
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WE SHALL UNDERTAKE STEPS TO MAKE CLEAR, IN A DIPLOMATIC
WAY, TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT WHAT WE THINK ABOUT THIS
STATEMENT."
5. THE REASON FOR DECIDING TO TAKE ACTION NOW, BEGIN
EXPLAINED, WAS THAT ISRAEL HAD "RELIABLE INFORMATION
FROM THE MOST RELIABLE SOURCES" THAT THE REACTOR WOULD
BE OPERATIONAL "EITHER IN JULY THIS YEAR OR THE LATEST
IN SEPTEMBER." "LESS THAN THREE WEEKS FROM TODAY ...
WE COULDN'T DO ANYTHING WHATSOEVER TO PREVENT THE IRAQI
TYRANTS FROM DEVELOPING ... BETWEEN THREE AND FIVE
HIROSHIMA-TYPE NUCLEAR BOMBS ...," BEGIN CLAIMED.
HE THEN PROCEEDED TO DEPICT GRAPHICALLY THE PROBABLE

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RESULTS IF THREE SUCH BOMBS WERE DROPPED ON ISRAEL: "THEY COULD HAVE DESTROYED COMPLETELY ... THE BASIS OF OUR INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL, AGRICULTURAL AND CULTURAL LIFE. SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND CASUALTIES WE WOULD SUFFER, WHICH WOULD MEAN IN TERMS OF THE UNITED STATES 44 MILLION (CASUALTIES) ..." THEN, INVOKING HIS FAMILIAR HOLOCAUST ANALOGY, BEGIN COMPARED THE DANGER OF RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT TO THAT OF ZYCLON-B GAS USED AGAINST JEWISH CHILDREN BY THE NAZIS. "THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POISONS. RADIOACTIVITY IS ALSO A POISON." ISRAEL WOULD NOT HAVE STRUCK AGAINST THE REACTOR AFTER IT HAD BECOME OPERATIONAL BECAUSE TO DO SO WOULD HAVE MEANT THAT "HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT (IRAQI) CITIZENS ... WOULD HAVE BEEN HURT." "WE FACED THE TERRIBLE DILEMMA: SHOULD WE NOW BE PASSIVE AND THEN LOSE THE LAST OPPORTUNITY, WITHOUT THESE HORRIBLE CASUALTIES, ... TO DESTROY ... THE OSIRAQ REACTOR AND THEN NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE IT UNOPERATIONAL ANYMORE OR SHOULD WE ACT NOW?"

6. ASKED FOR DETAILS OF THE OPERATION, THE THREE

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GENERALS REMAINED TIGHT-LIPPED. IVRI SAID THAT THE PILOTS HAD BEEN TRAINING FOR MONTHS AND "THE EXECUTION WAS PRECISELY ACCORDING TO THE PLAN." "ORDINARY (AS OPPOSED TO "SMART") BOMBS WERE USED." IN THE COURSE OF PREPARATIONS, "TECHNICAL AND OTHER MEANS (DEVICES)" WERE DEVELOPED WHICH WERE ATTACHED TO THE PLANES. TO COMPARE THE STRIKE AGAINST THE REACTOR WITH ONE AGAINST SYRIAN ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILES IN LEBANON, IVRI SAID, WOULD BE "LIKE COMPARING A TOMATO TO A CUCUMBER ... THE MAIN AND BASIC THING IS THAT WE HAVE ALREADY CARRIED OUT THIS ATTACK AND SUCCESSFULLY. AS FOR THE SECOND ATTACK, IT IS STILL AHEAD OF US." ACCORDING TO EITAN, DURING SUNDAY'S RAID THE ATTACKING AIRCRAFT ONLY MET WITH SPORADIC ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE FOLLOWING THE ATTACK, ALTHOUGH NO MISSILES WERE FIRED. IT WAS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THE ATTACKERS WERE PICKED UP BY ENEMY RADAR ONCE THEY HAD CROSSED THE BORDER. HE WOULD NOT ELABORATE.

7. IN OTHER POINTS, EITAN SAID THAT IF THE SAUDIS HAD ALREADY HAD AWACS, "THEY WOULD HAVE DETECTED US EVEN BEFORE TAKEOFF." ON THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION AND THE NPT, BEGIN REITERATED THE GOI POSITION THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT BE THE FIRST TO INTRODUCE NUCLEAR WEAPONS INTO THE AREA AND WOULD SIGN THE NPT ONLY AFTER THE ARAB COUNTRIES HAD MADE PEACE WITH ISRAEL. HE EXCORIATED FRENCH AND ITALIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE IRAQIS AS "SHAMEFUL," PARTICULARLY SINCE THESE TWO EUROPEAN COUNTRIES "SAW WITH THEIR OWN EYES WHAT HAPPENED TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE ... (AND) REMEMBER OUR TRAGEDY PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHERS ..." BEGIN POOH-POOHED CONDEMNATION

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OF THE RAID INSISTING "THAT THE NATIONS ARE WITH US."
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